

## DISABILITY: A GLOBAL CONCERN

### What do we know about people with disabilities?

#### Higher estimates of prevalence

More than a billion people are estimated to live with some form of disability, or about 15% of the world's population (based on 2010 global population estimates). This is higher than previous World Health Organization estimates, which date from the 1970s and suggested a figure of around 10%.

According to the *World Health Survey* around 785 million (15.6%) persons 15 years and older live with a disability, while the *Global Burden of Disease* estimates a figure of around 975 million (19.4%) persons. Of these, the *World Health Survey* estimates that 110 million people (2.2%) have very significant difficulties in functioning, while the *Global Burden of Disease* estimates that 190 million (3.8%) have "severe disability" – the equivalent of disability inferred for conditions such as quadriplegia, severe depression, or blindness. Only the *Global Burden of Disease* measures childhood disability (0–14 years) which is estimated to be 95 million (5.1%) children of which 13 million (0.7%) have "severe disability".

#### Growing numbers

The number of people with disabilities is growing. There is a higher risk of disability at older ages, and national populations are growing older at unprecedented rates. There is also a global increase in chronic health conditions, such as diabetes, cardiovascular diseases, and mental disorders, which will influence the nature and prevalence of disability. Patterns of disability in a particular country are influenced by trends in health conditions and trends in environmental and other factors – such as road traffic crashes, natural disasters, conflict, diet, and substance abuse.

#### Diverse experiences

The disability experience resulting from the interaction of health conditions, personal factors, and environmental factors varies greatly. While disability correlates with disadvantage, not all people with disabilities are equally disadvantaged. Women with disabilities experience gender discrimination as well as disabling barriers. School enrolment rates also differ among impairments, with children with physical impairment generally faring better than those with intellectual or

sensory impairments. Those most excluded from the labour market are often those with mental health difficulties or intellectual impairments. People with more severe impairments often experience greater disadvantage.

### **Vulnerable populations**

Disability disproportionately affects vulnerable populations. There is a higher disability prevalence in lower-income countries than in higher-income countries. People from the poorest wealth quintile, women, and older people have a higher prevalence of disability. People who have a low income, are out of work, or have low educational qualifications are at an increased risk of disability. Data from selected countries show that children from poorer households and those in ethnic minority groups are at significantly higher

### **Education**

Estimates for the number of children (0–14 years) living with disabilities range between 93 million and 150 million. Many children and adults with disabilities have historically been excluded from mainstream education opportunities. In most countries early efforts at providing education or training were generally through separate special schools, usually targeting specific impairments, such as schools for the blind. These institutions reached only a small proportion of those in need and were not cost-effective: usually in urban areas, they tended to isolate individuals from their families and communities. The situation began to change only when legislation started to require including children with disabilities in educational systems.

#### *Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD)*

The inclusion of children and adults with disabilities in education is important for four main reasons. Education contributes to human capital formation and is thus a key determinant of personal well-being and welfare.

Excluding children with disabilities from educational and employment opportunities has high social and economic costs. For example, adults with disabilities tend to be poorer than those without disabilities, but education weakens this association

([http://whqlibdoc.who.int/publications/2011/9789240685215\\_eng.pdf](http://whqlibdoc.who.int/publications/2011/9789240685215_eng.pdf))